

5. Reading LEADER through processes, styles and approaches for planning

The reconstruction of the strategies adopted in the European countries and the emblematic case of the Puglia region have highlighted some limits and critical issues that therefore require a profound rethinking and above all highlight the need to find ways to interpret the processes and provide recommendations for self-assessment and policy suggestions. Therefore, with all these elements in mind, we will try to reflect on planning styles, strategies and approaches in order to devise a final, logical interpretative framework for self-assessment and future policy suggestions.

The current debate on rural development practices focuses on the neo-endogenous approach in European rural areas, trying to identify its modalities, actors, strategies and relationships, and recognizing that the LEADER method, albeit with its limits and critical issues, has a leading role in stimulating the territories especially those affected by development and peripheral delays (Cejudo and Navarro, 2020).

The literature review presented by Gkartzios and Scott (2014) enables the main characteristics of the different models of rural development to be identified. According to the authors, the first "modernist" model which developed after the Second World War in Europe viewed rural areas as highly dependent on external input from a technical, cultural and economic point of view. This model was therefore compatible both with objectives of economic growth on a productivist mold, and with a top-down approach. The exogenous approach to development showed its shortcomings linked to the strong dependence on external input in both the political and economic sense, and the distortions caused by the focus on single sectors, activities or locations. It was considered destructive

because it eliminated the cultural and environmental variety of rural areas and was imposed by others who were mainly external experts.

These criticisms have sparked such debate on a European scale that they have led to a significant change especially in the last two decades through the transition from sectoral to integrated and territorial approaches (Ibidem). In fact, this contributed to the emergence of endogenous development approaches as early as the '90s, exemplified in Europe by the LEADER programme. The essential elements of this approach were: a territorial and integrated focus, the use of local resources and the local contextualization of the interventions through active public participation. The development-focused objectives leverage the concepts of multidimensionality, integration, coordination, subsidiarity and sustainability (Ibidem).

In this case, too, the following characteristics emerged: territorial (non-sectoral) approach to development; local scale interventions; economic development interventions aimed at obtaining the maximum benefit through the enhancement of local resources; development focusing on the needs, capabilities and perspectives of the local community.

This emblematic change inevitably goes hand in hand with the downward transfer of powers enabling the transition from a top-down to a participatory bottom-up approach to take place (Ibidem). However, here too there was no lack of criticism of the endogenous approach. As shown by the authors, the main limitations highlighted in studies on the subject concern problems of participation and elitism. Moreover, the idea that the local rural areas can pursue socio-economic development independently from external influences is rather an idealization and does not reflect the practice in contemporary Europe since any rural location will include a mix of exogenous and endogenous forces, with the local level interacting with the extra-local.

Instead, it is crucial to understand the ways to improve the capacity of rural areas to carry out these processes, actions and resources to their advantage (Ibidem). In view of the rarity of a purely endogenous model, a hybrid model between the exogenous and endogenous model is more realistic, capable of focusing on the dynamic interactions between local

areas and the wider political and institutional, commercial and natural environment. This model, defined by Ray (2001) as neo-endogenous, therefore describes a strongly rooted approach to rural development but at the same time open to external solicitations. This approach requires a rethinking of development, focusing on local resources and local participation that act on different levels of interaction in an innovative, dynamic and creative way:

“The use of the term 'territorial' is also meant to concentrate attention onto the issues facing the vast majority of people as they are acted upon, and seek to engage with, globalisation/Europeanisation in that the term encapsulates the innate tension between the local and the extralocal. Increasingly, the spaces within which action (whether emanating from the 'bottom up' or from the 'top down') is being organised are being formed and re-formed as a function of creative tensions between local context and extralocal forces. It is through the medium of these dynamic tensions that the forces of modernity are materialising; just as it has been argued that '(rural) development' takes place at, and is defined by, the interface between the agents of planned intervention and the actors in localities, so territories themselves are being moulded and created by the local–extralocal tensions of globalisation and reflexive modernity. Thus, the use of the term territory (or 'place') signals the intention to formulate some of the options for action available to people in territories to which they feel a sense of belonging and in which the forces described above are manifesting themselves” (Ray, 2001, p. 8).

The definition of neo-endogenous development has been explored in depth in our previous research too, along with some specific case studies (Belliggiano et al., 2018; De Rubertis et al., 2018a; Labianca et al., 2020). The neo-endogenous approach introduces an “ethical dimension” of development focusing on people's needs, abilities and expectations, in an inclusive and participatory context. In particular it introduces “new sensitivities”, which go beyond the exogenous and endogenous modes. Instead of focusing on the outside (external investments and agricultural

modernization objectives), it focuses on the inside (local actors and resources), going beyond the theory of growth and recognizing the importance of supra-regional contexts and the strong effect of international flows on local processes (De Rubertis, 2020, p. 7). In previous work (Belliggiano et al., 2018) we have examined the most prominent literature (among others Neumeier, 2017; Bock, 2016; Dax et al., 2016; Butkeviciene, 2009), demonstrating that social innovation is at the heart of the process. It produces an “increase in the socio-political capability and access to resources (empowerment dimension)” (Butkeviciene, 2009, p. 81). Therefore, in the following table, the attempt is to synthesize and make clearer the main features of the approaches to rural development.

Table 4. Main features of the different approaches to rural development.

Main features	Exogenous	Endogenous	Neo-endogenous
<i>Policies</i>	Top-down approach Sectoral	Bottom-up approach Participative Territorial Integrated	Bottom-up approach focusing on flows and participation Holistic
<i>Participation</i>	Information/ communication (passive role)	Active participation of local community	Empowerment
<i>Resources</i>	External (technological, cultural, economic)	Local resources	Mixed resources
<i>Objectives</i>	Economic Productivity	Development (local needs, capacities, perspectives)	Development as a continuous rethinking of resources and local capital (selective and reactive community)

Source: Our elaboration.

These premises are important in establishing the perspective within which we move if we need to explore planning strategies, in this case extended to the rural context. As anticipated in the introduction, an interesting distinction regarding planning strategies is made in Healey's

work (1997). In fact, based on the literature, the author very effectively reconstructs two main approaches: strategy-making as politics and technique and strategy-making through inclusionary deliberation. In our study, it is assumed that this distinction and reconstruction is useful in getting a better understanding of the strategies adopted and of the main critical issues that emerge in the LEADER programme with the application of the concept of neo-endogenous development.

In fact in Healey's work (1997, p. 243) it is assumed that the institutional design, the forms of governance, the planning style, and the organizational methods are part of a "dynamic endeavour which evolves in interaction with local contingencies and external forces, in order to address the agendas of those with the power to shape the design". The distinction between the approaches allows us to understand the assumptions, the operating modalities, and their limitations within this context.

In the first approach, strategy as policy and technique, which flourished during the 1960s throughout Europe, the formulation of plans is based on the translation of strategies into operational principles and regulatory rules to guide development, mainly linked to economic and physical planning. Although it contains many ideas and principles that provide valuable ideas for the construction of strategy, it is however limited by its assumptions of "instrumental rationality" and "objective science". In this case, rational techniques are used for the achievement of objectives, while analysis and evaluation serve for the selection of "better" or "more satisfying" alternatives among a series of possible strategies. On the other hand, strategies are primarily based on problems and quickly translated into performance criteria and objectives. On an entrepreneurial level, the process concerns achieving coordination and a marketing vision (Ibid., pp. 242-248).

The planning process, based on scientific technology for the elaboration of strategies in complex and interconnected contexts, assumes that strategies could derive from analytical routines based on empirical investigation and deductive logic. The objectives therefore express the purpose of the strategies. The resulting process model sought to

distinguish the discussion of objective "facts" from the discussion of values. For planning, the necessary elements focused mainly on achieving goals, steering the action to achieve the desired results, and comprehensiveness.

It is interesting to notice the major criticisms of this approach. They include: the recognition of the limits of knowledge, the impossibility of an agreement on the objectives in a pluralist policy, the tendency to imagine futures through incremental methods starting simplistically from the existing, the underestimation of the variability of contexts, the essential conservatism of methodology, the difficulty of grasping the dynamics of complex and contradictory changes, the complex interconnections with politics, the effectiveness of the policy-making activity rather than the focus on the process, and problems concerning identity and ways to knowledge (Ibid., pp. 250-252).

In this context, the "space of action" is defined in the field of technical work, analysis and evaluation carried out by technicians in their offices, through to the formulation of ideas and tools used to manage the environment externally. This usually produces plans containing a mere collection and instrumental manipulation of the data (Ibid., pp. 252-253).

The most recent shift towards the interactive perspective on strategy-setting states that strategies and policies cannot be the result of objective and technical processes, but must be actively produced in social contexts. This vein has developed slowly and has followed different directions including the "consensus method" in which the planner is a "debate facilitator" rather than a "substantial expert" within open debates.

In the evolution of planning thought, this area included a technocratic managerial technology widespread in Europe in the 70s for the construction of networks. The main criticalities in the process were linked to the lack of attention towards power relations and to the ethical issues of network construction (Ibidem). In this field there are two dimensions for this kind of learning activity: the first, single cycle learning, focuses on how to best perform the tasks within certain parameters; the second concerns knowing the parameters and then modifying the conditions under which the activities are performed.

Double-cycle learning can take place through dialogue, thanks to which people can collectively explore and learn about issues through group dialogues. In this case knowledge and understanding are produced through social interactivity and if we understand the strategy we are pushed to move from analytical managerial technologies to social ones. However, this is still a limited approach in the context of "an individualistic" and "objectivist conception" of the external world. Developing strategies through inclusive deliberation occurs within a socially constructed reality in which knowledge and understanding are produced through the collaborative social learning processes, not through abstract techniques (Healey, 1997).

The approach makes some important assumptions. In the first place, the sharing of power takes place through multiculturalism, in the social relationships in which individuals build their identities through networks of potentially multiple relationships. Social learning processes are based on the creation of trust to create new relationships of collaboration and confidence and encourage the shift of the power bases. This involves real changes, with the removal of hegemonic communication and power distortions.

Secondly, the approach stresses the importance of practical awareness, and local, scientific and technical knowledge. Local knowledge has specific reasoning processes, solutions, values and people's concerns will emerge in a variety of forms in collaborative contexts.⁷

Third, the emergence of needs, problems, policies and modalities to be followed must be actively created through the fractures of the social relations of those involved, thus encouraging the participation of all interested parties. Consensus building can indeed generate trust, understanding and new power relationships between participants, producing social, intellectual and political capital (Ibidem).

⁷ These local resources indicated by Healey in the form of social relations, social capital, cognitive capital, human capital and its variety can be traced back to our definition of territorial capital (see De Rubertis et al., 2018a; 2018b; 2019a; 2019b; 2020) on which local development paths and visions depend. These aspects will be explained more clearly below.

Fourth, this process creates an institutional capacity that affects not only the participants, but also the participants' social networks. Consensus building can therefore create new cultural communities capable of transforming themselves. The result not only affects new ways of accessing knowledge, but also new ways of acting and new political discourses. In this sense, consensus building and practices have transformative social potential (Ibidem).

There are no limits on strategies as they can be developed in many different institutional contexts. Successful strategy-making creates strategies and policies that convince stakeholders of the value of taking a new direction and all it implies by creating a new discourse or story out of a series of problems. Such discourses break new ground and have the potential to change the structuring of social relationships. The involvement of different voices and the cultural diversity prompts reflection on "visions of the world" from the different contexts through which a policy-making exercise passes.

The strategy-making activity that "makes the difference" and brings transformation therefore involves social processes which generate new shared beliefs. This implies reviewing and reflecting on existing ideas, generating new routines and forms of organization and ideas that can be incorporated into local knowledge. Strategy is therefore a delicate balancing act, between what is and what could be. At the two extremes, if it is modified in a limited way, the effort may simply produce the state quo, or it can produce problems of political and social acceptability (Ibidem).

An important aspect to consider is that there is no a priori model: it is produced locally, through reflection on methods, organization and consensus (Ibid., pp. 265-268). In this review, we also find the key elements of the two main planning approaches that allow us to get a better understanding of the critical aspects of the LEADER approach, in particular in its form and application at the local level.

Healey argues that since there are profound differences in the two main approaches to planning, it is essential first of all to make a critical review of the arenas of confrontation, of the styles of governance and

communication, of the processes and of the ways of constructing the strategy.

In the institutional design of processes for collaborative and inclusive strategy activities, the arenas in which the debate takes place must be critically re-evaluated. In particular, formal political structures, although often guarantors in terms of ethical conduct, can however be a marked limitation since these arenas are so dominated by particular ways of thinking and organizing that they inhibit the voices of the stakeholders and limit the development of new ideas and approaches.

The impulse to change can come from within or from outside, but the role of the activators is fundamental. The latter are those who have a key role in recognizing moments of opportunity and mobilizing networks around the common idea. They are capable of formulating the strategy and have an acute sense of dynamic social and economic relationships, as well as being capable of mobilizing interests and commitment by focusing on who to involve and on the methods. The relevant actors must be able to interpret the potential opportunities, and to elicit critical reflection by the community about the direction to take (Ibidem).

In this context and in order to initiate a decisive change that allows the community to follow the path of strategic planning, as opposed to the rational style, according to Healey, a communicative and inclusive “ethical challenge” is needed. This will open up to the real democratic discussion, where the actors are actively and genuinely involved in all stages of the process, participating in the debate with their peers and making their voices heard. As for the process, it must be easily reconstructed, the analysis must be conducted analytically and so as to include minority positions, it must allow the collective imagination to conceive of possible paths, freeing itself from previous practices and seeing problems in a new way.

The quality of the approach is that of the style and ethics of the discussion context. This allows the attention of those involved to be maintained throughout the process and also keeps the focus on the requests of the interested parties. The strategy must be flexible, evolve

dynamically, critically and reflexively, guaranteeing periodic review and allowing the creation of a renewed cultural community.

In this way, social, intellectual and political capital is developed among the interested parties, thus generating an institutional openness towards the networks established, affecting both daily life and cultural coexistence, creating trust and understanding through which knowledge can flow and act as a resource for subsequent collaboration. It is an approach that involves profound rethinking regarding style, modalities, processes, also in terms of reflexivity and discourse, as we have tried to show through a personal re-elaboration, based on previous and ongoing research, as well as current applications as shown in Table 5.

From our critical review of the LEADER method and the approaches to planning, it emerges that, at least from a programmatic point of view, the traditional measures and policies explicitly aiming at objectives of economic growth and competitiveness are the product of the rational approach while the measures and policies aimed at neo-endogenous development of the territories are related to the 'visionary' approach.

Here, it is clear how the two approaches are distinct, with the methods adopted and the communication styles specific to one or the other. In this re-elaboration we have tried to underline the crucial aspects which previously emerged, compatibly with the strategies adopted in the LEADER method. By reading the variables observed it is possible to understand which approach has been consciously or unconsciously adopted. On the regulatory level this logical framework could allow insiders to be able to interpret their practices critically and open an important debate with greater awareness about the major critical issues of their interpretation and adaptation of the LEADER method in their local context.

This self-assessment, especially at a local level, regarding methods, styles of government and governance and approaches to strategy can be considered fundamental in the light of European experiences and the major problems emerging (as shown in the previous paragraphs). We think that it should be an almost obligatory step to understand in a subsequent phase of control and monitoring (therefore avoiding mere

compliance with indicators mainly of economic results and return on investments), identifying which elements worked and which weaknesses were revealed in the path implemented in order to intervene by adopting the appropriate corrective measures.

In order to complete the logical framework, in the last row of the proposed table we have tried to summarize the main critical points highlighted in Healey's work. They concern many aspects, each associated to one of the two main approaches considered. They range from the problems of knowledge of the context and knowledge production, up to the methods and principles which govern the processes.

The standardization of practices, the inability to elaborate visions for the future, the persistence of the status quo even after several attempts at change and investment (as very often happens in the context of community funding and not just for LEADER), the lack of awareness and reflexivity on the path taken by the actors involved, are all attributable to the more traditional planning approach largely outdated in scientific and political debates (examples are the programme guidelines of development programmes in different fields at all levels) but probably not completely overcome in practice (as revealed in the previous paragraphs).

Possible reasons may be related to the significant efforts that neo-endogenous approach requires on a human, social, institutional and political level. In fact it requires substantial renewal efforts and work on the intangible local components that are difficult to quantify and to date underestimated in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the community programmes. These intangibles regard fundamental components of the so called territorial capital, mainly human, social and cultural⁸, whose quality affects the possibility of imagining alternatives and visions, profoundly changing ways of acting, rebuilding and redefining power relations inside the territories in which they are active.

⁸ The reference is to the concept of territorial capital developed under the PRIN 2015 entitled "Territorial Impact Assessment della coesione territoriale delle regioni italiane. Modello, su base place evidence, per la valutazione di policy rivolte allo sviluppo della green economy in aree interne e periferie metropolitane" (Coord. M. Prezioso) and present in our research, in particular see De Rubertis et al., 2018a; 2018b; 2019a; 2019b, 2020.

As Healey (2007, p. 180) argues in a more recent work, strategies are complex social constructions. Therefore they require complex institutional work in bringing together actors and their relational networks, to create new communities and political networks that can act as carriers of strategic ideas through the evolution of governance over time. In the following paragraph these aspects will be examined more deeply and connected to the LEADER practices.

Table 5. Main features of planning and practices.

Variable	Rational planning	Spatial planning
<i>Type of Strategy</i>	Strategy-making as politics and technique	Strategy-making through inclusionary deliberation
<i>Approach</i>	Top-down	Bottom-up
<i>Relevant Context</i>	Institutional, political	Social, cultural system
<i>Participation</i>	Information, communication, passivity of the actors Limited to some stages of the process	Active participation / empowerment Open and guaranteed at all stages of the process
<i>Style</i>	Argument focused on objectives Adoption of technical / formal language Inclusion of relevant stakeholders or of some selected minorities	Argument active inclusive Adoption of common and shared language (communicative ethics) Minority inclusiveness (inclusive ethics)
<i>Process</i>	Mostly formal / institutionalized Standardized, limited to change Analysis, technical and abstract process	Formal / informal Open/dialogic / flexible / relational Analytical and shared Collective imagination of possible paths Path reflexivity and evolution
<i>Strategy</i>	Focused on goals, maximizing preferences Formal, technical Coherent, rational, scientifically justified Limited review Goal monitoring and their achievement	Focused on problems, community needs Mixed formal / informal Flexible / in evolution / reviewed Critical and reflexive Reviewed Openness to different evaluations and alternatives Continuous monitoring in a dynamic context

<i>Knowledge</i>	Abstract techniques Mostly from the outside, external experts	Collaborative learning processes Dialogical, reflexive
<i>Territorial context (description)</i>	Complete census (exhaustiveness principle) Visible and material elements (principle of evidence) Each element as a distinct component (reduction principle) Linear and neutral knowledge Information layers (principle of causality) Territorial homogeneity	Attempt to understand reality and its complexity Role of intangible, social and human characters Circular relationship between subject-object of knowledge Specific and subjective knowledge Territorial diversity
<i>Main Criticisms</i>	Limited knowledge Poor agreement on objectives Little awareness of the real opportunities, problems Adoption of incremental methods to imagine the future Reproduction of the status quo Underestimation of the variability of the contexts Conservatism, simplification Excessive attention to techniques, procedures Poor reflexivity Excessive priority to results Standardized description of the context, mainly from the outside Standardized objectives and plans	Idealistic approach Difficulty starting process Processes not always controllable Presence of an adequate institutional and political context for the challenges Difficulty in accepting new ideas and changes

Source: Our elaboration based on reflections by Healey (1997), previous and current research and ongoing applications.⁹

⁹ It is the result of research in the field during these years, its application has been tested during the “Organizzazione e pianificazione del Territorio” and “Sistemi Informativi Geografici” courses held at the University of Salento too.